

Members of the Appropriations Committee, thanks for your consideration of HB 5037, Dental Reimbursement Rates. My name is Ronnie Coleman and I am VP, Government Relations for Benevis. We do non-clinical support for Medicaid oriented dental practices in 15 states and DC. We are based in Atlanta and support 5 Sutton Dental offices in Connecticut. Prior to the pandemic Sutton saw almost 22,000 mostly Medicaid patients with 51,000 patient visits a year. I would like to thank Connecticut Medicaid and specifically Dr. Balaski for leadership on dental issues and recognizing the need for fair provider reimbursement to better insure access to those in need.

We are hopeful this year will provide another opportunity to gain a much needed boost in reimbursement, as the pandemic has revealed the many shortcomings of the safety net. Sutton practices are seeing a decent number of patients, but they are struggling to maintain and recruit clinical staff. Obviously, some of that just matches the challenges associated with the pandemic. The more challenging part is trying to operate on a fixed income in a time of increasing supply/labor inflation. Commercial dentists and lower volume Medicaid providers can make up/balance some of the costs for treating Medicaid patients. Sutton dental offices are generally 75-90 percent Medicaid. Supply costs, staffing costs, PPE, ventilation and etc. are really taking a toll. Appropriately, commercial dentists have been able to raise fees, add surcharges and push for increases in insurance reimbursement. Medicaid providers remain stuck in neutral while the costs keep rising and their

reimbursement has stagnated. This is particularly troublesome for those that treat the adult Medicaid dental population. We struggle when seeking to recruit and retain clinicians in this environment; our staffing is down from pre-COVID 12 dentists/86 staff to now 9 full and part time dentists and 43 staff.

Sutton is a kid first family friendly general practice that also offers orthodontia and expanded dental services. Currently, only 20 percent of Sutton's Medicaid patients are adults. For the adult Medicaid patients they see, it is my understanding they many not even recoup the cost of providing the services. Child dental costs are also rising.

I would ask that you consider equalizing reimbursement for the adult dental program and the child program. The dentists we support inform me that adults take more time, often their issues are more complex and the supplies cost more. If rates improved to the child level, I suspect Sutton dentists would be positioned to see more patients and they could hire more team members. Additionally, a bump in child rates to reflect the rising cost of care in this environment would definitely make a positive difference.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Ronnie Coleman, Vice President, Government Relations for Benevis supporting Sutton Dental Practices